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Effective Saturday May 19, the sea bass commercial daily possession trip limit will be lowered to 150 lbs. This trip limit change is required because of recent action taken by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. The following letter was sent to all permit holders on May 15.

May 14, 2001

BLACK SEA BASS PERMIT HOLDERS

ASMFC Reduces Trip Limit for Black Sea Bass

DMF Changes Effective Saturday May 19, 2001

By now many of you are aware of the ASMFC action taken a few weeks ago to drop the black sea bass trip limit from 1,500 lbs. per day to 150 lbs. per day or 1,000 lbs. per week. This action is triggered when 40% of the quarterly quota is taken, that is, when 272,000 lbs. are landed. The quarterly quota is about 680,000 lbs. contrasted with last year's 739,000 lbs. We were scheduled to have a 1,500 lbs. daily limit that would have dropped to 750 lbs. once 75% of the quarterly quota was reached. Now that has changed.

ASMFC projected that 40% would be caught by May 14. Therefore, effective May 19 our state limit will decrease to 150 lbs. per day. Administrative and enforcement concerns prevent us from allowing 1,000 lbs. per week as an option. We've provided additional days to give sea bass fishermen adequate notice of the change.

This is the ASMFC approach for the remainder of the second quarter (April - June). Its purpose is to prevent a long closure of the second quarter and the possible loss of mid-May through June fishing until the 3rd quarter begins on July 1.

This ASMFC decision to drop the limit at 40% was made because catch rates for bass were high during the first quarter and were expected to remain high in the second quarter possibly causing a closure of inshore sea bass fisheries even before fish reached inshore grounds, such as Nantucket Sound. Since the beginning of the year, DMF has unsuccessfully argued for a reduced second quarter limit to minimize the impact on our inshore fishery. We didn't want a repeat of last year when the fishery was closed on June 9 until July 1 when the fishery re-opened. Now we have a lower limit that is very different from last May's limit (2,000 lbs. per day) that contributed to the early closure of the fishery.

There are benefits to this lower limit in Massachusetts waters for this spring. A portion of the sea bass stock reproduces in our waters in June. Fishing pressure on pre-spawning and spawning fish on close-to-shore spawning grounds, therefore, will be drastically reduced. This could pay dividends for local spawning and year-class production. In previous years DMF proposed a spawning closure for black sea bass (May - June prohibition). The closure was never adopted because we would not restrict state waters' effort any further without restrictions in federal waters.

On July 1, the fishery will reopen with a daily limit of 1,000 lbs. We assume the loss of May and June landings for sea bass potters who have not switched to other fisheries will be recouped after fish have spawned. Catches should be high.